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FBI director says defector can't help Soviets much more

By Bill Gertz
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FBI Director William Webster said yesterday the recent defection of former CIA operative Edward Lee Howard caused only short-term damage to U.S. intelligence operations.

"He's useful for propaganda purposes, and he will be exploited," Mr. Webster said during a luncheon meeting with editors and reporters of The Washington Times.

"But I doubt very much that he has anything left of substance to give that he's not already sold, even before he left this country," he said.

In a wide-ranging interview, Mr. Webster endorsed "rational" drug testing to combat illegal drug use and said the U.S. ability to halt domestic terrorism continues to improve.

The administration is "moving toward war" against illegal drugs, the FBI director said, but he noted that vast quantities of cocaine entering the country each year indicate that "we're a long way from declaring victory."

"I think the effort to reduce the demand for drugs, the effort to demonstrate a drug-free society, which includes a rational use of drug testing, is going to be an essential ingredient before we can really say we've declared war," Mr. Webster said.

"As long as we think of the drug dealers as the bad guys and the drug users as being mere victims," he said, "we haven't declared war."

President Reagan said recently he would favor voluntary drug testing among federal employees.

On the question of domestic terrorism, Mr. Webster attributed the recent drop in attacks to improved FBI security programs.

"We have used sophisticated, sensitive and occasionally intrusive — but always lawful — techniques against terrorism," he said.

Among the methods used against domestic terrorism, Mr. Webster said the FBI has developed a sophis-

ticated computer data bank for its intelligence analysis section. The bureau also uses advanced electronic surveillance, undercover agents and informants to spy inside terrorist groups.

"It's not easy to penetrate a small, cellular group — we have done so,"

he said. "Once that penetration takes place, the organization tends to hunker down because they don't how much we know, or who in the organization has been acting."

Both right- and left-wing Armenian terrorist bombings, widespread in major U.S. cities five years ago, have been halted, he said.

Of Howard, the fugitive wanted by the FBI on espionage charges, Mr. Webster said the alleged spy eventually might decide to return on his own after spending time in Moscow.

Howard was granted political asylum by Moscow two weeks ago for what Soviet leaders said were "human considerations" following a global search for the former CIA agent.

Before he defected, Howard had received CIA clandestine operations training from 1981 to 1983 in preparation for a Moscow assignment but failed a polygraph test and left the agency under a cloud, according to U.S. officials.

Mr. Webster declined to discuss the circumstances that led to Howard's escape from FBI surveillance in New Mexico last September



William Webster

and said most of the information about the case remains secret.

U.S. officials have been reluctant to discuss the case, and Mr. Webster's comments provided some of the first details on the case from a senior U.S. official.

Because Howard was employed in the CIA for a relatively short time and never served as a CIA case officer in Moscow, "all the information that he had was information that was given to him in preparation for his assignment there," Mr. Webster said.

"So while it was damaging, and there's no question about it, it has sort of a finite quality about it," Mr. Webster said.